



5231

Testimony of Carol Walter, Executive Director, CT Coalition to End Homelessness to the Human Services Committee, February 5, 2009

**Proposed Bill H.B. No. 5231: AN ACT CONCERNING A PILOT PROJECT TO PROVIDE HOUSING TO FAMILIES SEEKING EMERGENCY SHELTER**

Senator Doyle, Representative Walker and Distinguished Members of the Committee:

Thank you for hearing my testimony today. I am Carol Walter, the Executive Director of the CT Coalition to End Homelessness and I am here to support H.B. 5231 concerning a pilot "rapid re-housing" program for families who enter CT's homeless shelters.

First, allow me to explain just what it is we are asking you to support. Rapid Re-housing combines one-time and short term financial assistance with supportive services to help families who experience homelessness to quickly exit shelter to appropriate housing. Assistance would be provided over a 3 to 12 month period, would include housing search and placement assistance, life skills and money management training, and referral and connection to mainstream and other services. A flexible child care assistance fund will be available for parents who have begun employment but are not yet receiving Care for Kids subsidies. Cash assistance for these families would equal no more than \$6,000 per year-around the same amount that it costs to keep a family in our emergency shelter system for the same period.

The program is directed to families whose barrier to independence is primarily economic, combined with a need for transitional supportive services. It is simple, yet effective and in other parts of the country has helped reduce shelter stays, and ultimately reduced homelessness among families.

Our proposal for CT's Rapid Re-housing pilot, which I am grateful to point out has received the support of the Governor in her budget recommendations, relies on existing resources to build a framework for this initiative and future homelessness prevention funds expected to flow from the federal government. The Beyond Shelter CT program will be re-tooled to provide the relocation and home-based supportive services, HOME subsidies committed by the Department of Economic and Community Development will provide dollars for housing assistance, and the Department of Children and Families will allow access to flex funds for the high number of DCF involved families in CT's homeless shelters. We expect Federal resources and local philanthropies to do the rest and allow us to build on this model in order to reach our ultimate goal of preventing homelessness among families.

Rapid Re-housing is smart, simple and cost effective. It provides an alternative to sheltering, which for too long has been our primary response to catastrophic housing crisis for families and individuals. But it is not a solution to homelessness by itself. Responsive service systems, available and appropriate affordable housing, good jobs and quality childcare and transportation are the true antidotes to homelessness. Let's continue to create those opportunities, and while we do it, let's make sure that CT's children wake up each morning in a home of their own.

Thank you. I would be happy to answer any questions.